

# TENNESSEAN OP-ED: QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FLOOD OF 2010 STILL LINGER

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by U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper

(This column is the second in a three-part series )

In order to find out what really happened during the Flood of 2010, the Army Corps of Engineers should release all of its records, including e-mails, texts and voice mails. We should know what they were saying inside and outside the Corps.

The Nashville office of the Corps is run by a new lieutenant colonel every two years. He is the only active-duty officer in our branch but has zero experience in managing water. The current officer is a very good man but, without such experience, must follow the lead of his civilian staff. Military rules prohibit the lieutenant colonel from complaining about his position.

Our Nashville office reports to the Corps regional office for the Ohio River and Great Lakes. That office is commanded by Maj. Gen. John Peabody, whose biggest headache is keeping the Asian carp out of Lake Michigan.

Gen. Peabody will be testifying to Sen. Lamar Alexander's July 22 hearing on the Flood of 2010. According to his July 3 column in The Tennessean, he seems to have already decided that the Corps did its best during the flood. However, Gen. Peabody was not in Nashville during the flood.

Gen. Peabody has another headache because he knows that at least two Corps officials from Washington headquarters were, by coincidence, in Nashville during the flood. From what they witnessed, they were demanding to know "what the heck is going on" with the Corps.

The Corps' "after action" report is due to be released July 22. In the report, the Corps will be grading its own performance. As President Ronald Reagan liked to say, "Trust, but verify." Sen. Alexander's hearing will begin the verification process.

The Corps' river missions are navigation, hydropower, recreation and flood control. These missions sometimes conflict because the first three require high water levels; the last requires low. Technically, the Corps does not promise flood control, only "flood damage management," which is obviously much less helpful to downstream residents.

The Corps says that Old Hickory, the main dam on the Cumberland above Nashville, is primarily for navigation and hydropower, not flood relief. Who knew? Most people thought the dam was also for flood relief, just like they think that Old Hickory Lake is for recreation. The Corps has other ideas.

According to the Corps, Cordell Hull, the next dam upriver on the Cumberland, is also primarily for navigation, not flood relief, although no barge has traveled there in years. If it's not being used for navigation, why can't it help reduce flooding?

Percy Priest Dam on Stones River can reduce flooding, as can other tributary dams. On the Cumberland, however, only Wolf Creek Dam, deep in Kentucky, is for floods. Wolf Creek's lake is huge - larger than all of our area lakes combined - but its dam is under repair.

We need to make sure the Corps does not whitewash what happened during the Flood of 2010. The public is entitled to the facts. We also need to understand the Corps' thinking. Under Corps management, there is no dam on the Cumberland River above Nashville whose purpose is "flood damage management," until you get 216 miles upstream to a broken dam. Too few Nashvillians knew how risky our river was before or during the flood.